

**"Innovative ways to deal with violent extremism"**  
**La Maison du Futur and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung**  
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**Fourth session: “Terrorism through the eye of the Arab world”**

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First of all we should distinguish between religious extremism, extremism, and terrorist organizations, defined as religious, military and political groups which brand themselves as Salafist and jihadist, and seek to establish an Islamic state using terrorism as a means to achieve this end. Terrorist organizations such as ISIL, and Al-Nusra Front and al-Qaida, share the goal of establishing an Islamic state, but are using different tactics to reach this goal.

All attempts to combat terrorism have failed, and we need to wonder about the where and why of this shortfall.

As for the Iraqi experience with terrorism, it encompasses three decisive periods:

- **Pre-emergence of terrorist organizations phase:** It started in the nineties when Iraq was under a UN Security Council system of comprehensive embargo. The consequences of the embargo have been catastrophic for the people and the economy of Iraq, and the country struggled with an increase in poverty rates. The Saudi humanitarian aids began then to flow to the country going directly to some mosques which become later on a hotbed for Salafists. The former regime militarized the society and escalated its crackdown against political dissidents using harsh and cruel measures including beheading and mutilation. Additionally, the perilous security vacuum in some areas produced an environment conducive to the growth and success of armed extremist organizations such as Ansar al-Islam and Jamaat al-Tawhid and Jihad, which mutated into al-Qaida in Iraq. As for the lessons learned from this phase, we can underscore the danger of linking humanitarian aid to broader political goals; when a foreign party capitalizes on a country’s dire economic conditions and uses aid as a political tool, this

could contribute to the emergence of terrorism. Furthermore, we should stress the danger of indiscriminate arrests on terrorist related charges, which could make of innocents an easy prey for recruitment by extremist groups especially in prisons.

- **The aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq phase:** The second phase began with the US invasion of Iraq and continued until 2006. This phase saw the emergence of groups who took up the banner of resistance against the occupation, which emboldened terrorist organizations to follow into their steps using nationalist sentiment as a trap for recruitment and sectarian rift as a selling point. Alternatively, the US military withdrawal from vital areas led to a vacuum that terrorist organizations were eager and ready to fill. As to lessons learned from this phase, we can say that foreign interference often breeds terrorism, allowing terrorist organizations to wielding control over populated areas.
- **The third phase, between 2006-2015,** witnessed the beginning of the defeat of terrorist organizations for many reasons, the first being the Sunnis rejecting al-Qaeda regressive rule and their backlash against the groups' handgrip on their regions; secondly, the divergence between Indigenous, and Arab and foreign insurgents mainly caused by cultural and social differences, and thirdly the continued military and security pressure on al-Qaida and its offspring.

Finally, the recent rise of ISIL was caused by a series of internal and external reasons behind. Regarding internal reasons and in addition to corruption and ill-management, we can cite the inability and incompetence of local police to deal with terrorist organizations, coupled with the federal police reticence to intervene fearing to incite animosity with Sunni citizens as most of its manpower are Shia. As to external reasons, the civil war in Syria, which turned to become a proxy war, has left the region open to terrorist organizations. They gained control of heavy and hi-tech weapons along with financial capacity through controlling oil fields in Syria and Iraq. With that caveat in mind, ISIL is no longer a mere terrorist organization, but one that operates like an army.